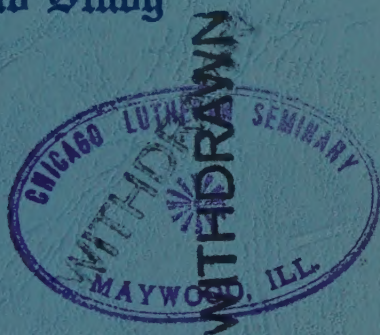


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The Bible

A Preface to Study



No prophecy ever came by the will
of man: but man spoke from God,
being moved by the Holy Spirit.

— 2 Peter 1:21



The Bible

A Preface to Study

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Foreword

Publication of *The Bible—A Preface to Study* reflects the perennial concern of the Division of Student Service that our young men and women search the Scriptures in such a way that their spiritual lives may be constantly refreshed and empowered by the Word. Without the Word no Christian, student or otherwise, can long endure.

Professor Richard R. Syre, a member of the faculty of the Central Theological Seminary in Fremont, Nebraska, has outlined in this booklet an approach to the Bible which is demanded by the very nature of the Scriptures themselves. Beginning with the thesis that the uniqueness of the Bible requires a unique approach, the author draws a sharp distinction between those who come to the Scriptures "in faith" and those who read the Bible merely as literature, as history, or as resource material for a purported "objective" study of religion and morality.

Those who have had any contact with Biblical Seminary in New York City will, upon reading this booklet, come to the conclusion that Professor Syre must have studied there. And they will be correct in that deduction. Prior to attending Biblical, the author studied at the University of Vienna in his native Austria. He has done graduate work at the Gettysburg Theological Seminary, at the Princeton Theological Seminary, and at the University of Nebraska. After a five year pastorate, the author joined Central's faculty in 1943. Last year he was a National Lutheran Council representative at the Bad Boll theological conferences in Germany.

Professor Syre is only partly responsible for the questions at the end of each chapter. Suggestions were also made by the Regional Secretaries of the Division of Student Service, and the questions were put into final form by the Reverend Paul Bierstedt, the Divisional staff member who carries major responsibility for the Bible study program.

The Division of Student Service issues this *Preface to Bible Study* with the recognition that it is just that—a Preface. It is not

a substitute for the study of Scripture; it is designed rather to stimulate such study and to remove certain barriers which may interfere with our own hearing of the Word of God. In short, this booklet should serve as a useful tool. But in the end each of us must rely upon the Holy Spirit who alone can lead us into all truth.

DONALD HEIGES

Chicago, Illinois
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The Motive of Scripture

The purpose of this introduction is to establish a point of view. It is to identify certain basic presuppositions concerning which we must be clear before we can fruitfully undertake the study of this book.

The Bible discloses its true meaning only to those who respond to its appeal by belief. To study the Scriptures outside this frame of reference may be profitable and at times inspiring. The Bible can be and has been studied as an historical document, as poetry, as the expression of the genius of a nation. At the outset, however, we insist that the proper study of the Bible must be undertaken from a point of view which its uniqueness demands. What, then, is the motive of the Bible?

The Disclosure of God

The Bible, unlike any other book, is not the product of creative human impulses. It is not a compilation of poets and historians, but it is the witness of prophets and apostles who were moved by the Spirit of God. Its province is not the enrichment of human literature, but the revelation or disclosure of God. It cannot be viewed as the unfolding of man's ideas about God, but rather must be seen as the testimony of those who carried a message from God. Its unity, consequently, lies in its end, as the author of Hebrews states: "God, having of old times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets . . . hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his son . ." (Heb. 1:1,2)

The Bible, therefore, makes a supreme claim upon the reader. It demands more than an alert appreciation of its literary qualities or of its wisdom. Rather it demands that the reader distinguish between the instrument which God has chosen for the revelation of Himself and the revelation, between the manner in which the message is conveyed and the message. The Scriptures are more than documents; they are a means by which God speaks to the heart of man.

What has been said may be illustrated by the experience of a botanist who came to visit a friend in Chicago. As they were walking along a busy avenue, the botanist suddenly stopped. "I hear a cricket," he said, cocking his ear in a certain direction. "You must be mistaken," his friend replied. The botanist persisted, and walking over to the side of the

street, he lifted a piece of cardboard. There was the cricket. "How can you hear a cricket in all this noise?" asked his friend in amazement. "Oh," exclaimed the botanist, "we usually hear what we are listening for." What we are referring to can also be illustrated by the mother who, though asleep, is aroused by any unusual stirring of her babe, while seemingly undisturbed by other sounds.

We mean, then, by a point of view a being sensitized to the central, the principal voice of the Scriptures. We mean that selective attention to which we are called by the Church's confession that the Scriptures are more than the historically, poetically, or culturally significant documents of an ancient people, but that they are the voice of God addressing me. In other words, the Scriptures are the instrument of the Holy Spirit to give spiritual perception and faith in Jesus Christ.

Revelation—Not Discovery

The New Testament in many places insists that this faith is not the result of discovery, but of revelation. One of these passages may serve to elucidate the distinction. When Jesus in Matthew 16 asked His disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven."

Jesus here clearly distinguishes between ordinary insight, on the basis of ascertainable evidence, and revelation. Peter is called blessed not because he drew conclusions more rapidly than the other disciples but because he was the recipient of revelation. He was not distinguished because of the brilliance of his mental processes, which led to an extraordinary conclusion, but because he expressed what could not have been said on any other evidence than that given from above.

Given—Not Wrested

This precludes any attempt to arrive at faith in Jesus Christ by what is commonly called "research"—not even Biblical research. The evidence for this faith does not lie within the material which is accessible to purely human inquiry, but upon evidence which is "given," given by the Spirit and grace of God.

We cannot simply set out to "prove" the assertion that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord by a careful sifting of the historical elements of the gospels. If this were the case, our problem would not be difficult. We could then put the matter on a kind of intellectual elevator; at the bottom would be the most easily perceived evidence and then by degrees the

less obvious. The non-Christian would be either the unfortunate individual who could not grasp what he had been taught or the mental recalcitrant who would not learn what he could grasp. But obviously the matter is not that simple.

The Record and the Revealer

As we have said, Christian faith does not rest on what we may call historical evidence alone. The Gospel is indeed grounded in historical events, and it is necessary that the record of these events be reliable. But revelation goes beyond the events and interprets them. Revelation in its most elementary meaning is an unveiling (*apocalypstein*). It is a laying bare of something which, without this act, could not have been perceived. Something outside of human ken has been made an object of apprehension.

Attention can be fixed on two aspects of this act. We can exclaim, as we sometimes do, "This has been a revelation to me." We can center our attention on what has been illuminated for us. We can appraise it in the light of our increased understanding and finally incorporate it into the sum total of our knowledge. The other aspect of revelation is seen when we fix our attention upon the Revealer. God is the Revealer. *Man may see or not see what God reveals, but he does not discover what God does not choose to make known.* Nothing which may subsequently be said in this book is of greater importance for the study of the Scriptures. The subject matter of this revelation is secondary in importance to this fact. It can never replace it.

Not Superior Knowledge

If the Bible were merely the repository of information disclosed by God concerning Himself, which if acquired by man were sufficient for salvation, then it would follow that man could save himself. He could do so by supplementing human knowledge with divine wisdom. This would become superior knowledge; man could boast of it, teach it, treasure it. But God would thus become only a point of reference to be alluded to in order to enhance the prestige of the possessor.

This erroneous view of the function of God's recorded revelation was held by Judaism at the time of Jesus. Our Lord spoke of it when he accused the Jews, "Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; but ye will not come to me, that ye may have life." (John 5:39,40) Here is not a choice between the Scriptures or Jesus, but between a right conception of the function of Scripture and a wrong one. The Jews would not come to Jesus to receive the life for which they were searching.

Theirs was a wrong attitude toward God the Giver, accepting the gift (life) without the Giver. It led to the presumption ("ye think") of possessing what never could be possessed by man of himself, even eternal life. This error appeared also in the scholasticism of the Middle Ages and in that of the post-Reformation period.

The Living God Speaks

Why is it necessary to speak of these matters in an introduction to the Bible? Because the study of the Bible in itself is not a virtue, neither is it necessarily salutary. The Pharisees studied too. The motive of Scripture is not to enhance the pride of knowledge, but to bear witness to the gifts and grace of God.

The Bible is motivated by the living God who wishes to make Himself known. His Spirit is present with His instrument, the Scriptures. The Bible is, therefore, not a chance product of the search by men in which God was passive, but a determined and dynamic self-revelation. (cf. Mt. 11:27). This revelation is finished only when the purpose of Him who discloses is fulfilled. He alone determines the mode, the time, and the degree. He is free.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the most common presuppositions and prejudices with which a student approaches a book?
2. What would be the difference in approaching the Bible as literature and as revelation?
3. In what ways would you distinguish between discovery and disclosure?
4. What difficulties face the reader of the Bible from the fact that human writers are used to give the divine witness?
5. In what way do you understand that the Biblical revelation is not a result of intellectual research but a gift of God?
6. What bearing does Hebrews 11:6 have upon our approach to the Bible?
7. What is the central purpose of the Scriptures and what responsibility does this place upon the reader?
8. Discuss the relation between knowing the historical account of Jesus' death and resurrection and the acceptance of Him as Savior. Who is the active agent in the latter case?
9. There are several ways in which the authenticity of Biblical revelation has been thought to be established: (a) testimony of the church; (b) the claim of the Bible itself; (c) the proof by miracles; (d) the proof by fulfillment of prophecy; (e) the claim of inspiration; (f) its own inherent worth and truth. Which of these seems (or seem) most cogent, and why?

The Direction of Scripture

We have stated that the Bible is motivated by God who wishes to make Himself known. We must again plot our course from this vantage point, lest we lose ourselves in the realm which is now to be traversed.

No Ordinary Book

A book which has had so profound an influence upon civilization simply cannot be approached like any other book. "The true atheist," remarks Francis Bacon, "is he who handles holy things without feeling." We may come away from a play or lay aside a book of poems with the feeling of having liked it or not. At worst we are spiritually or intellectually impoverished for failing to allow a Longfellow or a Frost to extend our perceptive horizon. Not so the Bible. There our usual responsive categories of like or dislike are irrelevant. This is because the Bible is no ordinary book. It aims neither to please us nor to instruct us how to utilize human endowments more effectively; it presents first and foremost a witness to the living God. One can no more react indifferently to this than one can speak of liking or disliking birth, life, time, and death.

A poet or philosopher may address himself to a select audience. His book may seek appreciation for new insights into life. It may clarify thought or beautify expression. The Bible claims my attention in a far more searching way. It demands my response to its message that God not only exists but that He wills. This distinguishes the Bible from poetic insight or philosophical speculation. That God exists may be brought home to us by other means. The scientists may see the proof in energy; the philosopher, in design or purpose; the poet or artist, in beauty. The existence of God may be apprehended, as Paul reasons, "through the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20), that is, apart from special revelation. But what God wills can only be known when God also speaks.

Directed to Persons

This brings us within sight of the second focal point which must be discerned if we wish to appraise what the Bible can mean to us. In the Bible we are dealing not only with a revelation of God as a kind of

monument to His existence but with revelation directed to persons to whom something is to be revealed. The prophets' "thus saith the Lord" was as specific as Paul's "I give charge, yea not I, but the Lord" (I Cor. 7:10). The direction of the revelation is obviously first of all toward those who are immediately addressed. But time, condition, and occasion do not terminate it. They only localize the point of impact. It is made historic without being confined to the past.

Because revelation is thus directed it becomes the subject of witness. Prophets and apostles bear testimony. They were not people who were clairvoyant or who spoke or wrote because they could do it better than other people of their time; but they were people charged, or as the Scriptures express it, "moved by the Holy Spirit." Their witness is, therefore, not of a private character. It is not the insight of religious genius which discerns that which lesser mortals fail to see. Their distinction was in their appointment and charge. "And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain" (Jeremiah 20:9). "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16).

Witness, Not Observer

A witness differs from an observer. He is claimed, while the observer chooses. His designation is arbitrary, not depending primarily upon his fitness nor upon his initiative. He neither explores nor adjusts the substance of his witness. A witness is inimitable. His verdict is singular. One can no more learn to be a witness than one can learn to be chosen.

Thus revelation appears as a directed disclosure. It was vouchsafed to men and women of the Old and New Covenant as a secret made known to them in a unique manner. This secret, however, was not granted as a mark of personal distinction, but is often spoken of in the Old Testament as a "burden" (Zech. 9:1, Mal 1:1). It carries with it the implication of duty, a charge which is given in order that it may be delivered. The witness is at the same time a messenger. He mediates not his observation but his witness, not the results of his investigation but the content of a disclosure.

This task laid upon him by God the Revealer involves more than the testimony of his sight, hearing or feeling; it involves his whole person. In contrast to a detached observer, the witness is implicated. He carries his testimony as a treasure. He may choose the manner and method of his approach to those to whom he is sent. The prophets employed questions to arouse the conscience (Amos 3:3f), or they used puns to stir

interest (Micah 1:10f.). The used imagery (Jer. 13:11), or chose dramatic occasions (Amos 7:10) to deliver more impressively the subject of their witness, the proclamation. Their authority lay, not in the aptness of observations, not in interesting propositions or stimulating discourses, but in the total involvement in that which they knew to be not their own.

To designate the content of this proclamation the New Testament uses the term *Kerygma*. The etymology of this word points to *Keryx*—the herald. It sharply delineates the message as something which is authoritatively transmitted as a herald transmits the message of his king. Such a message, of course, it not open to arbitrary change by the herald. He proclaims what he is bidden to say without regard to consequences.

Jeremiah's Dilemma

At times his message may even be an enigma to the witness, as it was to the prophet Jeremiah. On one occasion he was bidden to buy a field at a time when not only the field but all the land except Jerusalem was in the hands of the invading Chaldeans. He performed faithfully all the punctillio of the transaction, while conscious of the inexorable doom of Jerusalem. That Jeremiah recognized the paradoxical nature of the transaction which he had performed is evident from what he says: "Behold, the mounds, they are come unto the city to take it; . . . and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest it. And thou hast said unto me, O Lord Jehovah, Buy the field for money, and call witnesses; whereas the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans" (Jer. 32:24, 25). Only later does another word of the Lord illumine for the prophet the significance of the purchase he was asked to make. Clearly Jesus implied the same characteristic of revelation when in explanation of his own act he stated: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter" (John 13:7).

To the Jew First

There is yet another factor which arises out of the observation that revelation is directed. Direction implies limitation. It implies specific applicability of the testimony only to those for whom it was intended. Jesus expressed this when he said, "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 15:24). The testimony thus becomes uniquely the possession of those to whom it is directed. The Old as well as the New Testament speak, therefore, to a chosen people (that is, to people who have historical continuity).

Frederick the Great once asked his personal physician, Zimmerman, "Can you name me a single proof of the existence of God?" Zimmerman

replied, "Your Majesty, the Jews." By that he meant that if one wanted proof of God which no one could contest, then one would have to turn to the most remarkable historical survival of a people known to man. This nation was called into being by an act of choosing. Israel, when it covenanted obedience, became the servant of God in regard to function; the prince of God in comparison to other nations. Honor and servitude are the dual aspects of His choice.

The Service of Israel

The service of Israel is thus service in history. It is terminated not when the servant no longer wishes to serve but only when God considers the service rendered, when, in other words, it is fulfilled. Paul teaches in Romans 9-11 explicitly that even after the establishment of the New Covenant the historical function of Israel is not abrogated.

Jesus defined his relation to the Old Testament when he said: "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets; I came not to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17). The Greek word *plerein* suggests completion in the sense of making up what was lacking. He fulfilled not only in the sense of making Old Testament prophecy come true in Himself, but also in accepting and perfectly fulfilling the servant role of Israel. Before Pilate he testified to the dual character of His kingship. King he was of a kingdom not of this world and the prince, that is, the representative of the people of Israel. As their representative he made up for them what was lacking in their service to God. In His death on the cross he not only accepted the full implication of that service but also made it fruitful according to the saving intention of God.

The Church

The Church, of whose founding our Lord spoke anticipatorily when He said "upon this rock I will build my church," became a dynamic fact at Pentecost. From that day on the Church was an historical entity, an *ekklesia*, that is, a people brought into existence by the creative will of God.

While from the vantage point of the New Testament we may speak of the Bible as the Word of God to all mankind, it must be remembered that in so claiming we anticipate what had become possible only on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ. In Him a new solidarity attained substance not superceding Israel but becoming part of it—being, in the words of Paul, "grafted in among them" (Rom. 11:17). In this sense, the revelation of God which found its summit and fulfillment in Jesus Christ is actually addressed to me. All of it is directed to me, not as information, historical or otherwise, but as communication. It concerns

me, not because there is any magical power in the pages of the Bible, but because by a marvelous extension of the grace of God I, having been made a member of the Church of Christ, find myself addressed by Him.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what ways is the Bible like other books; in what ways is it unique?
2. What implications are in the fact that God Himself chooses to address man directly in the Scriptures?
3. If God reveals Himself through natural manifestations, what need is there for a revelation by message?
4. What is the difference between the historian and the herald? And what are the responsibilities laid on each?
5. In what sense was the Bible written for a "chosen people"?
6. How does the individual "respond" to the message of the Bible, intellectually and spiritually?
7. Is there a difference in the response of the Jews in Old Testament times and the Christians in the New? In what ways is the response in both Testaments the work of God?
8. Is there "magical power in the pages of the Bible"?
9. In what sense is the Church the end-purpose of the Scriptures?

The Disclosure of Scripture

We have thus far concerned ourselves with two basic considerations with which, in some manner, we attempted to delineate the scope of our approach. In the motivation of Scripture we perceive its relentless dynamic. From thence the Scriptures have the power of their universal appeal. This truth, once perceived, bars the way to that misunderstanding of the Scriptures which would permit it only a place in the religious literature of mankind, but deny it the unique function of revelation.

In the second chapter we considered the direction of Scripture by means of which we attempted to mark off that area of our understanding which would prevent us from approaching it with a sense of deep personal concern. Thus motivated by God and directed toward me in a providential and gracious manner, the Scriptures are that vehicle of communion by means of which not only my intellect but my whole being is addressed.

It is now necessary to press our inquiry into a third realm which logically lies between the motive and the direction of Scripture. We are now ready to ask: What does Scripture disclose? What benefit should I derive from my serious preoccupation with it?

A Road Well-Marked

Perhaps it seems premature to ask at the outset what can only be known after the study has been undertaken. Again, however, we must be reminded that in the study of the Scriptures we are dealing with a unique book. Its aim is not to please, neither solely to instruct. It has held constantly the attention of a growing portion of mankind because people have discovered that its claim to uniqueness is well-founded. As modern students of the Scriptures, we are not in the position of an explorer who faces an unknown land, but we are rather in the position of those who, on a lengthening road well-trod by others before us, must guard against becoming lost by wilfully refusing the proffered service of those whose footsteps have well marked the path to attainment.

There is little final satisfaction in having squandered time and effort where such loss was neither necessary nor profitable. As we have stated

at the outset of our study, few of us come to value the Scriptures vitally by our own efforts alone. By the witness of those who have tasted and found nourishment for their souls we are imbued with zest to seek for ourselves.

First-Hand Study

Why then should we want to study the Scriptures for ourselves at all? Were it not better simply to take the conclusions of others, perhaps better fitted by prolonged application and mental endowments than we? Can we not be satisfied by a kind of codified, authoritative statement of the Church prepared by her best theologians in which the teachings of the Scriptures are explained in an orderly and comprehensive manner? The answer to this question is not rooted in a disrespect for the theological achievements of great churchmen of the past and present, but in the nature of the scriptural revelation itself. We have attempted to express the unique characteristic of the Scriptures by its designation of being directed, that is, we have claimed for the Scriptures that they mediate the revelation of God. This revelation, we have contended, is not so much a disclosure of certain information which can be relayed and utilized in some more convenient manner, but is witness addressed to me. Luther therefore calls the Scriptures a means of grace. That is, the function of Scripture is mediation between God who speaks and man who heeds. Studying the Scriptures is entering into His Presence. It is the unlocking of a door which brings the soul into an encounter with God.

Law and Gospel

Martin Luther, with that rare insight which makes him fresh even today, has reduced the disclosure of the Scriptures to two words charged with portentous meaning. The first of these is Law; the second, Gospel.

Luther thus reduced the complexity of the Old Testament to its common denominator, the Law. In order to understand what Luther meant by the Law we must go to Paul. In the Epistle to the Romans Paul discloses his own profound insight into the nature of revelation. The crux of the matter for Paul was the relationship between the Old and the New Covenant. Only by the experience of the New was it at all possible for Paul to view the Old Testament. Because of the revelation of Jesus Christ, his understanding of the Old Testament had been profoundly affected. He, like the Pharisees of his time, had regarded the Old Testament as in truth the disclosure of God, and the Law as the means to attain His pleasure. For Paul, before his conversion, the Law was a means to attain righteousness. After his conversion, however, Paul

came to view the Law differently. It was no less the revelation of the will of God, but he could no longer see it as the means by which man might attain favor with God.

Augustine and Luther and many others who came to follow Paul in this view regard the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans as one of the most profound reflections of Paul's Christian experience. For there he comes to grips with the awful reality that the revelation of God's will in itself does not save. He sees the Law there as a terrible mirror, a stark dispeller of all illusions about man. He sees the function of the Law, not only as revealing the holiness of God, but at the same time as disclosing the utter impotence of man to obey His will. By means of the Law he sees man hailed into the presence of God where he becomes able to discern his own nature. There in the consciousness of his guilt, and without hope to avert the wrath of God, he must say, "Wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

This is the startling paradox that that which came from God by way of Moses and the prophets could not give life. Contrary to the belief of Judaism then and today, it was not the Jacob's ladder which reached into heaven. Hence all the diligence, all the moralistic fervor of man, could by that way achieve only the starker disclosure of the radically sinful nature of man.

The Holiness of God

The summit of Old Testament disclosure, then, is the holiness of God. Its function is not to confirm the pride and confidence of man, but to shatter it. Again we may stop and ask whether it is not sufficient to accept, and even to approve, what Paul so forcefully taught and Luther so clearly recalled. Is it not enough to accept and to assent, and is therefore the Old Testament not a book that has only historical significance for us? If so, does it not suffice to possess a sketchy knowledge of the kings of Israel, the principal events, the laws and the poetry of the Old Testament? And can we not derive this knowledge second-hand?

In answering this question we must again return to our contention at the outset of this study. We have there stated that the Old Testament, as well as the New, is a genuine revelation of God, that its function is to mediate, not so much any particular information about God, but his witness. We have also contended that this witness was not delivered in a general manner addressed to whomsoever it might concern, but that it was specifically directed, first to the witness himself, through him to the people to whom it was spoken, and lastly, to us as members of the Church of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament, therefore, is much

more than history, poetry, law or prophecy; but it is the divinely appointed means by which God addresses *me*.

Dispeller of Illusions

This address in the Old Testament is, first of all, an invitation to see myself in the light of its revelation. I am asked to identify myself, not only with the prophets and seers, but with those to whom they witnessed. I am searched by the word of the Law in the Old Testament and in its light I discover reality. Most pressingly I see not only God but sin. I see myself as one deserving judgment and wrath and condemnation. The Old Testament robs me of my illusion of pride in my moral attainments. The more I let the Old Testament speak to me, the greater diligence I give to its message and witness, the deeper will be my apprehension; for the Old Testament sets me in the context of judgment in which I must stand before my God if I am to live before Him. These convictions concerning my own estate are of too searching a nature to permit others of my kind to convey them to me. Only as I stand in faith through the Scriptures before Him whose judgment is righteous can there come to me convictions so radically against my nature.

Such contact with the Old Testament brings me into the most searching relation in which no subterfuge, no rationalizing can successfully cloud the issue. I am not asked to compare myself with others and thus draw a more or less comforting conclusion somewhat like the Pharisee of whom Jesus spoke, who, noting the presence of the publican as he prayed, said: "God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men . . ." (Luke 18:11). In what Luther calls the Law I am confronted by the judgment of God. Here the issue is: Am I able to stand in this judgment? The verdict of my conscience, instructed by the Law, dispels the last shreds of pride. Here the vistas of the future are not those that sentimentality or shallow thought about God would eagerly paint. Here my soul, in the utterly unequal comparison, is forced into the dark night of despair.

A Gospel Before the Gospel

But as the soul despairs of itself, there comes into view in the Old Testament the second strand of the disclosure of God, which finds expression in His graciousness. There is in the Old Testament a gospel before *the Gospel*, an anticipation of the things which were to be fulfilled in the fulness of time. In this sense, also, we can speak of a methodology of the Scriptures. In the historical enactment of the Old Testament there is portrayed within time that disclosure of God which prepared the soul of Israel in expectation of the Messiah. There is an

organic unity between the Old and the New Testament. The Christ of the New is the Messiah of the Old, of whom Jesus could say; "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56).

There is thus good reason for Lutheran insistence that the full preaching of the Word of God must contain both the Law and the Gospel. We are constantly in danger of an over-optimistic assessment of human abilities if we overlook or give only slight emphasis to the self-disclosing factor of God's revelation. We are led along that deceptive road which comes to interpret the greatest gift of God in Jesus Christ as the crowning act of an endowment of man which began with his creation. Without such a contact with the true and real catastrophe which has overtaken man and separated him from God we are unable to estimate both the severity of God's judgment and the greatness of His grace. We would still be somewhat in the mood of the man who possesses many precious things, and since something even more precious is offered to him, is willing to add it to his possessions, not because he needs it, nor even because he desires it desperately, but because it rounds out his sense of well-being and pride.

The attitude, however, which the Old Testament seeks to inspire in us is that of the man in the parable of Jesus, who, finding a pearl of great price, eagerly sacrifices all in order that he might have it. Only as we have come to that abyss of self-disclosure, which the revelation of the holiness of God opens within us, can we even remotely assent to the bold statement of Paul. "Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8).

A Means of Conversion

Thus the divine drama of the Old Testament brings us to conversion, that is, to a change of our attitude, not only toward God, but also toward ourselves. We find ourselves in the mood of Peter when he replies, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). What Jesus Christ has both said to us and done for us becomes, not the crowning of something which we already have, but that precious gift which we have, because of our unworthiness, recognized as undeserved, but which in its graciousness opens to us in reality the gates of eternal life. Again this assurance cannot come to us second-hand. When once, by the disclosure of the Scriptures, our true condition before God is apparent to us, then the despair of ourselves can only be healed in the light of an act of an even more intense reality to us than that which

shattered our illusions. In Jesus Christ and in the witness of those whom He appointed to testify concerning the act of redemption occasioned by Him can the bitterness of our human failure be turned into the victory of life through and in Him.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Luther call the Bible a "means of grace"?
2. How do the natural means (human words) and the supernatural (God's disclosure) come to have effect on the Bible reader?
3. What are the purposes of God in the Law and in the Gospel?
4. In what sense are both Law and Gospel in the Old Testament as well as in the New?
5. What advantages and disadvantages are there in leaving the interpretation of the Scriptures to the theologians?
6. What benefits and what hazards are involved when an individual undertakes to interpret Scripture himself?
7. Discuss the so-called Reformation principle of "The Right of Private Investigation" (sometimes called "Private Judgment").
8. If God speaks His revelation to individuals, what are man's possible responses? How can he be certain of a right response?
9. What place would you give the Bible among your books, and why?
10. How do you understand the word "Conversion"?

The Study of Scripture

We are entering now upon the subject for which the three preceding chapters were written to lay the groundwork. It will be our present task to consider the practical aspects of this conception of the nature of the Scriptures. It should by this time be obvious that one of the first prerequisites of an approach thus founded is that of a first-hand experience with the Bible.

Personal Experience

First-hand contact implies that the reader is not only exposed to the content of either narrative or exposition, but that he gets this plus the manner in which the author chooses to present his subject. A first-hand approach, therefore, requires a wider area of response than that required of a second-hand approach. For an author in his original work claims not only the attention of sight and reason but what may be called the total response of the reader, which includes his feelings, his imagination, and will.

The difference may be illustrated in this manner. The composition of a musician, after its first public hearing, may be the subject of an essay. The critic may describe for the readers of his paper the impression which the composition has made upon him. He may compare it with others which he has heard. He may call it gripping, in some places; lyrical, in others; grandiose in design; and by such adjectives convey his impression. His essay, however, can never be taken as a substitute for personal hearing. The intention of the artist can only be realized as we permit him to let his composition speak to us directly. What he has to say in his composition is inextricably bound to the manner in which he says it. His selection of the component parts was made with the intention to most advantageously deposit thoughts or feelings in the hearer. They can never be made the substance of a report which can claim to be a substitute for the original work.

Revelation and Incarnation

Early in our discussion we discovered that the Scriptures are basically a record of witness. We attempted to make clear that the Bible is not

so much a code of rules which can be severed from its origin and thus become incorporated into the sum total of human wisdom, but that it is the divinely appointed means by which the disclosure of God entered the arena of human experience.

The doctrine of the incarnation throws additional light on this concept. The term "incarnation" is used to describe, in the first instance, the unique embodiment of God in the Person of Jesus Christ, recognized as the final and full revelation of God. In a secondary sense, however, the term is relevant to an understanding of the whole Scriptural revelation. The witnesses of the Bible lent themselves to the moving of the Spirit of God, not only with one facet of their nature, but with their whole personality. We are dealing, therefore, not with isolated bits of divine disclosure, which have been carried together and assembled in the Scriptures, but with persons through whom the divine disclosure is mediated to us. There is thus present in Scripture the divine and the human element fused into an historical person, analogous, but not identical to that perfect incarnation with which we are confronted in Jesus Christ.

An important consequence seems to flow from this reflection. While we often speak of the Scriptures as a book, we nonetheless imply that this book is not so much a unity of chapters, but a library of individual books, each bearing singular characteristics. Consequently, any preoccupation with the Scriptures must begin with the recognition that while we are studying a part of the Bible we are studying the record of a distinct witness. The writer of each book desired to press home the portent of his message by means of a literary appeal to the reader.

Importance of Literary Method

There are certain implications which we now have to consider. They fall into two groups. First, apart from and preceding any theological implications, certain demands are made upon the reader of a book. When an author chooses to convey his message by means of a book he must take certain preliminary steps in order to adapt his message to the reader. He must choose from all the material which may be worth relating that which most properly fits into his purpose. Since he cannot say all he wishes in one or two sentences, he must adopt a certain structure and an orderliness of procedure. There is implicit in the adoption of the form of a book a certain roundedness. Within its compass there must be discernible the relatedness of the parts to each other. There must, furthermore, be a coherence between that which is conveyed and the chosen means of the author whereby he conveys it. There must be elements of progress and purpose which permit the reader to discern that implicit unity which is indicative of the literary form of a book.

The medium of the book, then, makes certain intellectual demands upon the reader.

Secondly, the choice of the form of a book by an author to convey his message is indicative of the fact that meaning cannot be confined to one particular part of it, but rather that all parts of the book bear their proportionate share in carrying the message of the author. In order to understand what the witness has to say through the book, we must be confronted with a total impression of it rather than with a skillful selection. Each specific part of the book, then, contributes to the total message of it; the book as a whole has a meaning. This meaning it becomes our task to consider paramount. It is the meaning which the author wishes to convey; it is that unity of purpose which prompted the selection of the component parts. Without seriously coming to grips with what the author intends to say by the whole of his book, we can never be certain about the rightness of our view concerning any of its parts.

Thus far we have concerned ourselves with two preliminary considerations flowing out of the nature of the Scriptures as divine revelation: (a) first-hand contact is the proper mode of approach demanded by this character of Scripture; (b) the necessity of seriously regarding the form of Scripture as a library of books.

The Author's Point of View

Now to return to our last reflection. If it is true that apart from the meaning which I as a reader may discern in any part of the book, there exists that meaning which the author intended to convey, then it becomes very important to define some standard by means of which one may be kept from arbitrariness.

An author reveals his point of view, we have stated, not only by the choice of his subject, but also by the manner in which he employs the component parts of his composition. For instance, a book dealing with any historical period may more clearly focus upon a definitely limited time to which the author may give a proportionately larger amount of space than an equal distribution of the time-span covered may permit. That is, the author by his very selection of a few years or even days within the general period may thereby indicate that to him this period is for some reason of greater importance than any other time.

Let us attempt to illustrate this. In the fifth chapter of the book of Genesis the author covers a period of 1,556 years. He does this by means of listing the names of individuals and the time of their life before and after they became fathers of their progeny. If this chapter is taken out of its context and pressed for meaning the door is opened to all

sorts of arbitrariness. One, for instance, may insist that this chapter is a record of universal history. To another it becomes the astounding disclosure of the amazing span of human life. To a third it may be merely indicative of the dearth of knowledge available to the writer. All these judgments may have a degree of validity, but hardly for any of these reasons has the author of the book of Genesis included this chapter in his account. If this chapter, however, is seen as an integral part of the purpose of the author, its meaning may be more truly discovered. For within the passage of these 1,556 years in which he reaches from Adam to Noah, he declares with almost monotonous regularity that men have lived, begotten sons and daughters, and died. This monotony is almost startlingly broken in the twenty-second verse, when he reports of Enoch: "and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (verse 24).

The Key of Time

Does it not become apparent that the very repetition of the passing of time, begetting, birth, and death, is here interrupted in order to lift out the one fact for which the author makes the telling of the others requisite? In all this time, he seems to say, there was but one of whom it could be told that his relation with God was vital. In this sense, also, the author reveals his judgment upon this millenium and a half by barely registering the pulse of life. It is by the means of the author's use of time that one discovers his point of view. While he may be interested in the marvel of its continuity, he is not interested in the activity of such persons as Kenan or Mahalalel (Gen. 5); but he is interested in the amazing absence of men who sought God. This chapter, then has its function in relation to his total story. It conveys meaning as it is seen in its contributory relation rather than in its abstraction from it.

We may now be ready for a generalization: *An author reveals his point of view in what he has written by his comparative emphasis or omission of the factor of time.* The proportionate use of time, then, like other elements of composition, is one of the keys which is furnished to the reader to unlock an author's point of view.

The Key of Person

Let us turn to another criterion. Narrative is greatly enlivened by the portrayal of persons. Before the eyes of the reader of the Scriptures there is drawn a constant procession of men and women. There are some who obviously have greater significance for the writer's purpose than others. But in all instances the very selection and portrayal are indicative of the author's intention to make them carriers of what he has

to say to the reader. For instance, in the book of Ruth a message is clearly conveyed through the selection of Ruth, the Moabitiss, as the principal character of the book. The author could undoubtedly have taken as his subject the story of some hero or the description of some deed in war or peace by his nation; but he selected Naomi and Ruth and Boaz and showed through the intertwining of their lives that which motivated him to write. In this story he deals with the providence of God, though he never mentions it. He does not tell us in so many words that providence exists; he does not ask us dogmatically to believe in it; but he deposits the realization of it in our mind by causing us to see people and by telling their story.

Now we may be ready to add a *second generalization* to the one made above: *An author reveals his purpose or his point of view by the comparative emphasis or omission of certain persons.* That is, the reader, in appraising the message of the author, is not only under constraint to evaluate the author's choice, but also those whom the author has not chosen, whom he has selectively excluded. His frame of reference demands an imaginative reconstruction, on the part of the reader, which appreciates the selection by reference to those whom the author selectively assigned minor roles or excluded altogether.

Other Keys

A book, however, bears not only analysis in accordance with the use of time or person, but also in terms of other criteria. For instance, *places, events, ideas*, are additional factors which may be analytically apprehended in the structure of a book. The serious reader of the Bible may be helped in his understanding of the message of the individual book he is reading by being conscious of these diverse elements in the structure of the book and by topically pursuing them. He may use, in order to strengthen his memory and to facilitate his analysis, the method of charting these various factors and bringing them in coalition in some graphic form. But of this we shall have more to say at a later point of this study.

The nature of the Scriptures as witness we found to be conditioned by its form. This form we found to be books, that is, composite wholes written to convey a message. The form of this revelation, therefore, conditions our approach. We have further noted that elements of structure such as time, person, place, event, idea, and other such factors can and must be noted carefully by the reader of Scripture if he is to understand the author's point of view. The conscious employment of these criteria constitutes a skill which, while it may be exercised without conscious effort by certain gifted individuals, can nonetheless be acquired by any reader who wishes to derive more from his reading of Scripture

than piecemeal surface observations. How to acquire these skills and how to utilize them will be the subject of the next chapter.

Questions for Discussion

1. What unique results come from a personal, first-hand contact with the Bible itself? What losses are suffered without it?
2. What difficulty or paradox is involved in one's study of the Bible as a united witness of God and a library of books written by men?
3. What are some of the helps a reader gets for his comprehension of any book of the Bible if he knows something about the author and the circumstances under which the book was written?
4. How can a reader discover the over-all purpose of the individual author?
5. What is the danger of lifting verses or parts of verses out of the total context when attempting to interpret them?
6. What rules for understanding literature can you give which apply to understanding the literature of the Bible?
7. What makes the Bible more than literature?
8. How do you think the human elements of Scripture are used to give meaning and a message to the Bible reader?
9. Discuss: Scripture interprets Scripture.

Scripture and Responses

The will to respond is an integral part of the process of understanding. Any approach to the Scriptures where the will remains consciously outside the area of response is superficial, like a conversation which we carry on politely and somewhat perfunctorily. We know that at times we are able to hear intently, that is, with the whole being; for instance, when we crouch at the starting line of a race and listen to the all-important word "go." The difference between hearing whole-heartedly and hearing perfunctorily lies not so much in the words that are addressed to us but in our attitude. Whole-hearted hearing requires the elimination of conflicting motives to action. It depends upon our willingness to guide consciously our will toward response. Reading or hearing the Scriptures with profit requires the directing of our mind, a lending of our God-given faculties to the address being made to us by the Word.

Prayer as Preparation

We must begin with the highest kind of concentration, which is implicit in prayer. In order to hear, the center of gravity must be shifted from ourselves to God. Room must be made within ourselves, the soil of our soul must be prepared, as it were, in order that the divine Word may find us cleansed from choking cares. We may well begin by using as a prayer some words of the twenty-seventh Psalm:

"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee,
Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek.
Teach me thy way, O Jehovah;
And lead me in a plain path . . .
Wait for Jehovah;
Be strong, and let thy heart take courage;
Yea, wait thou for Jehovah." (Psalm 27:8,11,14)

In this manner we are imploring the essential aid of the Holy Spirit and also indicating to ourselves that we are now ready to respond with our whole being.

Seeing Aright

We must now indicate in what manner this response must be guided. We may again remind ourselves that the Word of God addresses us not

in single statements to be pondered or in certain laws to be obeyed, but that throughout most of the Scriptures we are addressed as readers of books. The foremost demand upon our response, therefore, is that of seeing aright. Similar to hearing, seeing is also possible in various intensities. We can see something in passing, as we see the landscape, which flits by as we travel in a speeding car. But we can also see with interest when we focus upon something, singling it out from other objects, giving it time to effect in us a more specific response.

There is yet a third stage of seeing, more intense than either of the preceding ones, which we may call *observing*. By the term *observing* we no longer mean to describe the somewhat passive attention of one who records by sight certain impressions. When we observe, we consciously guide our will; we establish a relation to the object; we respond to it as it becomes the object of our interest. We then see with the purpose to impress upon our mind various attributes of the object perceived, such as color, shape, size, motion, etc. Only as we intensify our seeing into observing do these attributes become recorded in our memory.

Who has not had the experience of having a familiar picture made infinitely more meaningful by the presence of someone who directed his observation upon details which hitherto had eluded his sight? While it may seem that certain persons may be endowed with a gift of such sight while others lack it, it is a commonly acknowledged fact that observation can be learned. Anyone who has come to value an object sufficiently to give it the benefit of intensive inspection becomes observant. He begins to see more than others in the measure in which he has come to treasure the object above others. What we truly see, then, does not depend merely upon our eyes but upon our will to respond.

Adopting Procedure

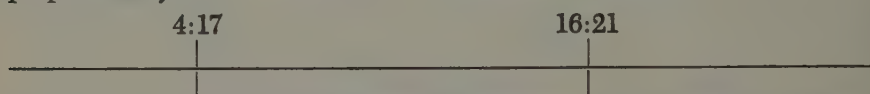
When we bring this insight to the study of Scripture, we find ourselves confronted with a wealth of detail which invites our observation. At this point we may easily become bewildered. There is a second factor in observation with which we must now concern ourselves. Observing is not only seeing more intensely, but it is guided seeing. It involves besides perception also direction. The observer is not only guided by what he sees but also by what he wishes to see. By adopting a method by means of which observation becomes a part of a series of steps, the observer submits to planful procedure. Thus from all the relevant facts he binds himself to pursue *certain* facts.

The directions into which observation may be guided can be defined in five distinct ways: cause and effect, contrast, comparison, repetition and means-to-end.

Cause and Effect

Let us take the first and most obvious one *cause and effect*. Our scientific age has frequently conditioned our thinking in terms of cause and effect. The moment I begin to see an observed fact in this relationship I am confining the area of my perception to a specific thing. By consciously guiding my search within the area of observation relating to causes and to effects, I am adopting method. Let us illustrate this by means of the Gospel of Matthew. In Mt. 4:17 we note the following statement: "From that time began Jesus to preach . . .". A similar statement is repeated in the sixteenth chapter, verse 21: "From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things . . .".

Suppose we draw a line on a sheet of paper, marking off 4:17 and 16:21 proportionally thus:



Let this line stand for the Gospel of Matthew as a whole. The statement, "From that time began Jesus," obviously marks the gospel into three epochs: the first from 1:1 to 4:17; the second from 4:17 to 16:21; and the third from 16:21 to the end. If we let ourselves be guided by this statement of Matthew, it appears "from that time" implies that certain conditions have been met and that at this particular point in the narrative their completion can be announced. This becomes clearer when we examine the second of the two instances (Mt. 16:21). Obviously our Lord found in the confession of Peter (Mt. 16:16) the fulfillment of the condition for further revelation. Up to this time he had not told his disciples that he was to suffer. But from now on (Mt. 16:21) he was not only to say so once, but repeatedly. The relation of cause and effect here is obvious and, if once discovered, underlines the same relationship in the first occurrence of this phrase in Mt. 4:17. Thus Matthew presents not merely a recital of the facts of our Lord's life, but he also shares with the reader the motives which operated in the life of our Lord. This becomes the reader's possession only as he first observes the specific manner of this statement and then explores it in its suggested cause and effect relation.

Contrast

The same gospel may serve to illustrate another relationship, namely, *contrast*, which can guide the reader into a fuller understanding of the message of the Scriptures. It is necessary for the reader to be conscious of the signs by which an author, many times, introduces subject matter which he intends to relate in a contrasting manner. For instance, he may

do so by prefacing a paragraph or a statement by means of conjunctions, such as *but*, *however*, *instead*, *nevertheless*. Consider the following well-known statement: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; . . . but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment . . ." (Mt. 5:21,22). The conjunction *but* serves here to emphasize the relationship of contrast. As the reader responds to this observation, he notes that the statements in verses 27, 31, 33, 38, 43 of Matthew 5 are all statements in *contrast* intended to alert the mind of the reader to the novelty of Jesus' teaching, thus preparing his mind to assent to the statement at the end of the Sermon: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." (Mt. 7:28, 29).

But an author may also indicate the relationship of contrast less obviously. For instance, he may do it by describing two characters. No one who has ever read the story of Abraham and Lot can altogether fail in appreciating Abraham more because he is contrasted to his nephew Lot (Genesis 12 and 18). Other modes of presenting contrast are figures of speech or colorful terminology, as for instance in Luke 11:11-13.

Repetition

Another relationship is that of *repetition*. The reader may note repetition in regard to persons, places, expressions, etc. Let us take for illustration Mark 4. There are four parables recorded; each of them, with the exception of one, deals with growth in terms of sowing, seed, and harvest. As the reader responds to this observation of repetition he notes that Jesus is using these parables in order to emphasize the mystery of the relationship of the Word to the Kingdom of God (Mark 4:1-14). If he further observes the pattern of repetition, it appears that each of the parables stresses a particular aspect of this mystery. First and foremost is the comparison with the seed. As he ponders the relationship thus emphasized he sees the Kingdom of God not as something that can be attained, but as something that must be planted; not as the work of man, but as that mysterious work of God which finds its analogy in the mystery of growth.

Comparison

The parables of the fourth chapter may also serve to illustrate the relationship of *comparison*. Often this relationship is indicated by conjunctions like *even as*, *even so*, *and*. It may also be expressed by associating similar ideas, or in terms of illustration and imagery. These parables afford comparison in a number of ways, for instance, as to the effect

of the Word. The parable of the Sower relates it most elaborately. The parable of the Light (Mark 4:21) describes the effect of the Word as revealing. The parable of the Secret Growth of the Seed in verse 26 gives a graphic description of the time which elapses between planting and reaping and the inactivity of man who sleeps and rises night and day while the seed springs up and grows "he knoweth not how" (Mark 4:27). The area of comparison here centers around the mysterious nature of this growth: once planted, like a seed this Word has the energy of life in it; it grows without the labor of man. The parable of the Mustard Seed also affords comparison of the seed with the Word. Attention is there called to the apparent insignificance and smallness of the seed and to the astonishing growth from it. Thus all four parables highlight a particular area of comparison between the seed and the Word.

Means to End

The fifth relationship is that of *means-to-an-end*. One may recognize the existence of such connections by the presence of the following terms: *in order that, so that, for*. But it may also appear less obviously introduced. In John 20:30 the evangelist states it this way: "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name." (John 20:30,31). The signs or miracles, which John describes, are intended to produce faith in Jesus as the Christ. That is, the miracles in John are to be seen in such a *means-to-end* relationship. Upon examination of the seven miracles (or signs) of John, it becomes apparent that each one shows the mastery of Jesus which in this order, relates to (1) matter (John 2:1-11); (2) distance (John 4:46-54); (3) time (John 5:1-18); (4) quantity (John 6:1-14); (5) nature (John 6:16-21); (6) calamity (John 9:14); (7) death (John 11:1-44). John the Evangelist by selecting from all the miracles which Jesus performed the seven which he relates in the gospel offers the reader progressive opportunity to respond to Jesus as the Lord of life and the Master over humanity's world.

Let us attempt by way of a summary to restate the issue. The reader of Scripture, who comes to give the book more than piecemeal attention, finds his quest for understanding deepened by knowledge of orderly procedure. He responds not only by observing but also by relating his observations. He is prepared not only to note the content of the book but also the manner in which the individual parts of the book contribute to its message. He determines the direction which his own observation of these five relationships suggests to him. Within this area of observation and disciplined response emerges the necessity of skill in their use. It is not enough to direct one's response in these

channels once or twice. In order to derive the satisfaction of fuller understanding the reader must acquire freedom in the use of his skill. It is somewhat comparable to the relationship between the composer and the instrumentalist. Faithful rendition of a new composition requires more than a perfunctory performance. The musician who wishes to render the composition of the artist must be a master of the skills which the composition requires. His skill finds its greatest honor not in individual virtuosity but in the faithful bringing to life of the composer's score. In the manner in which the reader has attuned his mind to disciplined observation and has allowed himself to respond to the observed relationships, the Scriptures will speak to him with singular force and cogency.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the significance of prayer in Bible study?
2. What do you understand by "spiritual insight"?
3. Is response made to the words of Scripture or to the Author of Scripture? Explain your answer.
4. How much does man apart from God determine his response to the Bible?
5. Is it possible to divorce one book from the whole Bible to get at its message? Explain.
6. What reading disciplines are useful in understanding the authors' central messages? (For example, as applied to Old Testament history and prophecy and to New Testament biography and doctrinal letters.)
7. Note Luke 5:21; 5:30; 6:7; 6:11. Luke here offers, in a series, reactions of the Pharisees. Can you find the causes in the section from 5:17-6:11?
8. How does Luke 6:12 record the effect upon Jesus? What is the significance of the choice of the twelve disciples in terms of the strategy of Jesus?
What, in terms of contrast, are you able to detect in this section (Luke 5:17-6:11)?
What, in means-to-end relation?

Scripture and Venture

Thus far in our approach to the Scriptures we have concerned ourselves primarily with attitude and technique. But simply to learn without opportunity to utilize what one has learned is a wearisome task. It seems implicit in the manner in which the divine Word is transmitted to us that its function is not only to instruct our conscience, but to enable us constantly to *grow* in grace. The new life begotten of God through the Scriptures provides a new motive for existence. Paul in *Romans* suggests the analogy of the members of the body having at one time been presented as members unto iniquity but by a new motive released again to righteousness unto sanctification (Romans 6:19). The old life in the service of sin frustrates, while the new life in the service of righteousness makes growth possible. There is a point somewhere along the Christian life where no further progress can be made unless old motives are abandoned and new motives are accepted. The Scriptures present to us for the old motive of selfish gratification, the new motive of the love of God.

If we now attempt to circumscribe the area in which this new motivation is to become effective, we may again employ a generalization. Certainly we are to be motivated ultimately toward a new life. This is the ultimate goal toward which end the Scriptures are to serve us. If we ask ourselves at this point more specifically what this new life is, we may be confused by the vastness and richness of its flow. This new life must be in many ways related to our God-given capacities if it is to have any meaning for us personally. It is wrong to assume that a sudden transfiguration takes place by means of which we enter into a new life that has no relation to the old. Let us then concern ourselves with several ways in which the Scriptures may minister to us as we grow in grace.

Enjoyment in Mastery

The Bible, if rightly and regularly used, will deepen the joy of the Christian life. In responding more fully than we have hitherto, and in a more orderly manner, to the witness of Scripture we are enabled to partake of a heightened sense of participation. Many of us remember

our first experience in a row-boat. The oars, in the beginning, in spite of their evident fitness for the task of propulsion, seemed to be like flails in our hands, beating the water with much splashing and only fitful locomotion. After having acquired the skill to coordinate in rhythmic motion, the sweep of the oars became, in the measure in which they responded to more skillful application, an increasing joy. The same holds true with any activity which requires the acquisition of skill. When skiing in the mountains we forget, in the freedom and exhilaration of mastery, the often fitful maneuvers and discouraging falls which in previous winters were our share as learners. So it is that increasing mastery in the use of Scripture brings increasing satisfaction.

Vitalizing Response

Participation, first of all, quickens various areas of response. Ignatius Loyola urged upon his spiritual disciples the practice of directed meditation. The disciple is urged to re-live, by means of the words of the gospels, every insight there recorded, until he has lived himself so thoroughly into every detail that it becomes part of his own experience.

A reader comes to insight in the manner in which he allows himself to be drawn out in sympathy by the author's account. His curiosity, aroused and channelled along the areas of observation suggested in the preceding chapter, will carry him forward in the search of the Scriptures. The quickening effect of such reading, open to the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit which flows through the Biblical account, is the natural effect of its inspiration. With every widening area of observation and with every attempt to proceed with heightened interest from whatever observations one starts, the reader will gain increasing self-reliance.

This is not a plea to dispense with the very necessary aid of books of reference and commentaries; but it is our contention that very often the joy in the reading of Scripture is nipped in the bud by too easy committal of one's own powers to the guidance of the expert. A commentary should be used as a hiker uses a boat when his path leads him to a river which he cannot cross without its aid. The Scriptures were not meant to be the exclusive prerogative of the theologian or the scholar, but they were addressed to the common man. Their life-giving, invigorating power can easily be diverted into the dry sand of purely academic interest unless we let them speak to us directly. It is only in this manner that our interest becomes aroused and our often perfunctory attention becomes focused. The goal of this reading is appropriation. It is the mastery of that which has been recorded in order that we may become stirred into the activity of thoughtful response.

Fashioning Convictions

Secondly, this reading leads to ventures in conviction. No profound conviction which drives its roots into our being grows by itself. Convictions which are no longer nourished by contact with and appraisal of new experiences become prejudices. The modern mass-man is constantly in danger of being forced into a mold of convictions by those who have ulterior motives. The terrible spectacle of mass influence, by means of the exclusion of information and a constant dinning into the ears of subservient masses of propaganda designed to relieve the individual of the labor of forming potent convictions for himself, is still fresh in our minds in the spectre of authoritarian states.

The Reformation uncovered for us anew the precious possession of the early church and made available the marvelous medium of nurture provided in the Scriptures. This freedom of inquiry, of response to the highest in the personal discovery of truth, is our precious heritage. While all of us gratefully acknowledge the assistance in the formation of our profound convictions which the church has rendered to us through its ministry of teaching, we must never relinquish the implicit urgency in the teaching of the Church of the Reformation to discover anew for ourselves what made our fathers strong in their day. To hold second-hand convictions is like being in debt in order to give the impression of wealth. The inevitable day of reckoning will shatter the illusion. The church and the society in which we live have a right to demand of us the will, the diligence, and the labor which must go into uncovering for ourselves the springs of genuine persuasions. We are surely feeding upon abstractions when we persuade ourselves that solid convictions are possible without the employment of those means to which God has assigned the power to form them. If we are not to exist merely as minors in perpetuity we must anew derive our moral and religious education from personal contact with the Word of God.

Educating the Will

True liberty in the individual is the fruit of a foregoing education, an education which presupposes a liberating religion. Liberty in our age, as much as in any previous epoch, is subject to external and internal dangers. The external danger of tyranny will best be met by those whose religious convictions have matured into character. It is true that God does not only will man to be free; he also wills him to be pure. Our will only learns completely to acquiesce when it has learned to adore. The soul can vary its object, but some object of veneration it must have. It may renounce its former idols, but it will demand another cult. The Scriptures open the gates to an inner life staid on God. Life, with its vacillation be-

tween revolt and submission, between the instincts of the ego and the tranquil sense of inviolability, can only be staid if it has learned to accept the will of God. The touchstone of such submission becomes finer and truer as we learn to substitute for fleeting allurements the guidance of Scripture for the education of will and conscience.

Developing Character

In submitting to the pedagogy of the Scriptures, we learn to assess ourselves and to wrest the control over our actions and habits from sinful self and to deliver it to the holy prompting of the will of God. This transfer is conversion, but it must be repeated day by day. Its continuation is the process of sanctification, which is our apprenticeship to heavenly things. In the Scriptures alone we find the true image of the Founder, undistorted by the refractions through which He comes to us by hearsay. There takes place that touching of the springs of spontaneity, which when it becomes conscious, radiates in intelligent moral action. In the conduct of life, habits count for more than maxims, for habits are living and have put on flesh. To arm oneself with new insights is but affecting part of one's nature, but to learn new habits is to reach the substance of life. Only when we face the imperious judgment of Scripture upon ourselves are we imbued with the hope of believing that this nature can be remade. Here we find the courage to turn away from an outer progress of things to the crucial issue of the knowledge of ourselves. This is the venture which must be dared on faith, the brave consent to a humility in repentance, which is the fount of the new life, where we are renewed day by day in the conscious admittance of our failures.

Thus creation is reproduced in analogy as the Scriptures touch not only our mind, but also our feelings and our will. Thus are fixed for us the fleeting moments when the Scriptures can have their perfect work with us, as we ourselves are seized by the Spirit in the venture of our devotion. The Christian character is thus hammered out on the anvil of our submission and fashioned into that new creature in whom the heavenly vision of eternal life becomes embedded in the tissues of new habits. Here, by the grace of God, the pattern is woven through our obedience, supplying the sinews that fashion inspiration into the reality of character.

Questions for Discussion

1. What new motive (or motives) does Scripture present to us?
2. What are some of the prerequisites for enjoyment in reading the Bible?
3. What is the role of the commentary in Bible reading?

4. What result does God have a right to expect from His Word in those who believe, in the matter of faith and holiness?
5. What determines whether a venture is "vital" for a Christian?
6. What do you understand by "the new life" which God promises and bestows in His Word?
7. How do Bible-based convictions serve in the practical solution of problems in daily living?
8. What demands does Scripture make on the person who will deny his life to save it?
9. Is it true that commitment to God brings "perfect freedom?" Explain.
10. How does the Bible "create character"?

Scripture and the Context of Life

Truth, according to the Gospel of John, is something that needs to be done (John 3:21; cf. also 7:17). The testimony of the Scriptures becomes truth for the individual as the living power of the Word is converted into personal intention and practice. When Polycarp of Smyrna, in the year 156 A. D., was asked by the Roman pro-consul, who was about to condemn him to death, "Who is this God of the Christians?", Polycarp replied, "If thou art worthy, thou shalt know." The Scriptures are not merely the instrument to convey religious ideas, but the divine instrument to attest to truth.

We must concern ourselves therefore in this section with the instrumentality of the Bible to make us doers of truth.

Doers of Truth

The proper mode of existence for a Christian is steadfastness, not a mere impressionism. Every refusal to recognize truth and to respond to it hardens the hearer's heart against further testimony and appeal. The degenerative process, once begun in what the Scriptures call "hardening of the heart," cannot arrest itself. It can only be arrested by a renewal of the mind, that is, by conversion.

The exiled prophet Ezekiel saw the glory of God, unlike the prophet Isaiah, flashing across the Dead Sea and up to the Judean wilderness, entering the portals of the temple. But the presence of God in the temple was not designed to give new splendor to a shrine, but to create a fountain in the wasteland. God's glory gave birth to a river flowing out through the same portals and making the wilderness blossom at its passing. Coming at length to the Dead Sea, the sweet waters of this river changed nature's vastest tomb into a reservoir of abundant life (Ezekiel 43:1-4; 47:1-12). In the striking imagery of this vision the function of Scripture as a stream in the desert of human barrenness may fitly be seen. The renewal of the mind consists first of all, in a conscious assent to being planted near the banks of the life-giving river. Renewal, therefore, is the task of the Scriptures which create the conditions under which truth becomes activity.

In a conversation, a lawyer not long ago ventured the statement:

"The Bible bores me." He expressed bluntly what implicitly accounts for the neglect of the Scriptures today. The Scriptures remain a closed book when they are sought only as a stimulus to intellectual or esthetic appreciation. While they deserve the praise of the best, their purpose is not to stimulate but to move. They are like a guide who tells the inquirer what lies ahead of him if he wants to look. They are instrumental in bringing to the vantage point, at which the realities of the spiritual life are most clearly displayed, only those who are willing to open their eyes and to take the consequence of their vision.

Our Dilemma

This, however, is exactly our dilemma. Who today is certain that this hardening process has not progressed in his own heart? Has not contemporary secularism covered our spiritual aspirations and sensitivities with layers of accepted satisfactions which smother the resonance of our heart? To exhort a man so smitten to love God with his whole heart is to try to gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles. It is like bidding a ship to sail when its mast has been stripped by the battering storm. How then are the Scriptures to move us when our ears are holden and our eyes, accustomed to the shadows, turn with pain and discomfort from the light which breaks from the sacred page?

Scripture Creates the Hearer

That the Scriptures consist essentially in a series of imperatives is a prevalent misconception. We are instinctively on guard against the battering of commands, things that we ought to do, sins we have committed, attitudes we must abandon. While it is true that a high type of moral life is enjoined upon us, the more crucial truth in our situation is that which the Reformation brought to light. The Scriptures are the presentation of grace, the gift of God for the redemption of sinners. The well-spring in the desert, of which Ezekiel speaks, is not made by the digging of many shovels. The new life that rises from the tomb is not magic but mercy. Along the banks of this river we are not bidden to admire the power of human achievement, but the miracle of the regenerative force of divine forgiveness. The Bible finds us as we are and, if permitted, takes us where we ought to go, not by the power of our effort, but by the magnitude of a love which follows us in our labyrinth of sin. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit creates in us the power to hear and to heed; the Scriptures are as necessary to the Spirit as the Spirit is to the Scriptures.

God addresses us through the Scriptures, and it is His Spirit who, making the words His tool to penetrate our senses, places in us the seed of

regeneration. The context of life, according to the New Testament, then, is not the stoic's determination for reform, nor the "wintry smile of duty," but the heart rising like a seed from under the clods of its burial of sin and frustration in response to the power of a generative love. The context of the Christian life, thus, is growth in grateful responsiveness and with an overflowing quality. At the portals of this life is not an altar upon which human personality must be sacrificed, but a fount of renewal which feeds toward the goal of holiness. It sets no absolute standards of perfection, weighting with a sense of inferiority those who are unable to attain it, but grafts into the stream of nascent life the desire to press on toward purity, brotherly love, industriousness, spiritual alertness, thankfulness, and prayerfulness.

Man vs. the Reality of Evil

Far more searchingly than any novelist, the Scriptures confront us with the reality of evil. There is no question here whether evil exists. Scripture faces the fact that men are capable of every conceivable abomination. In its mirror man is confronted by the truth. He is drawn into the tension, which exists in his own soul, between his own idolatry and the claims of God. When Jesus speaks of the content of man's heart, he probes more searchingly than any modern psychiatrist. But the grim climax to the whole question of evil is seen in the stark fact of the cross, which is so solidly anchored in these documents that no method of criticism can soften its outline. The epistles lead to its perception along nearly every avenue of their argument. The book of Acts shows Peter unflinchingly drawing attention to the cross in the first Christian sermon: "God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:36).

The Scriptures quite naturally see evil largely in terms of human sin. The blindness and insensitivity of the soul are fixed, however, not against the background of frustration and despair with the human race, but against the candor of a love which has found a way to transmute judgment into redemption. They never allow us to ignore the priceless worth of every person. Against the deadly disease of the twentieth century, with its analysis which has taught man to consider himself as nothing more than a beast or a machine, Scripture fixes our eye not only upon the evil within us but toward a frontier of life, where, by the grace of God, man can be given a new birth.

The Reality of Death

Scripture puts us in the reality of the context of life when it takes the problem of death seriously. There is no shadow of that gay optimism

which affirms that the death of the body does not matter. The pallid comfort of an immortality of the soul is not the doctrine of the Scriptures. The New Testament sees the dissolution of the body as a tragedy. It shows us Jesus weeping when he faced the tomb of a loved one. Paul pointedly states the issue in the grim words: "The last enemy is death." But once again the Bible's solution is the factual rather than the ideal. Its answer to death is the resurrection, not survival. Its pole star is the promise which grows out of the fact of Easter morn, not the theory of what God might do to assuage man's longing for survival.

The Problem of Life

Because it takes death seriously, it stretches the bow of life and charges the arrow with aim and power. Therefore its doctrine has always had more than the echo of unrequited desire. Every human society where the Scriptures lit the lamps of the human search for betterment could not long endure the sight of injustice, oppression, violence, and slavery. By having taken the problem of death seriously, the Scriptures are able to delineate fully the problem of life. To Jesus the human tragedy is that of sheep without a shepherd, of a life without aim and without guidance.

George Adam Smith translates Jeremiah 2:5, which in the American Revised Version reads: "They are gone far from me and have walked after vanity and are become vain," in this manner: "Following after the bubble, they bubbles became." Jeremiah's charge was that the unavoidable effect of going after falsehood is the transformation of the pursuer into that which he pursues. If we imagine that we possess freedom integrally, we are misled into a vicious circle, which spins us around the illusion of our own self-sufficiency. We find ourselves in the grip of the very forces within us, which, while clamoring most insistently for liberty, are destroying it. You will remember that Macbeth chose his first murder in a tumult of conscience. He yielded after struggle to the demand of his ambition for freedom of action, and so he killed his king. But he did not choose his second murder, nor his third, nor any after; they were the self-fashioned links in a chain which ended by leaving him bound body and soul to the evil witches of his fate.

The problem of life is viewed by Scripture not on mistaken promises of an illusory view of man as a being free to choose, but on the basis of a reality, the inclination of the human heart to slavery and self-destruction. "Whosoever commits sin is the slave of sin," said Jesus (John 8:34). As Luther viewed it, the greatest temptation of man is not to yield to the baser instincts, but to forget that the very highest in him is prone to an all-pervasive corruptive influence. Even his love, a quality which is

intended to flow outward toward others, is turned inward toward himself, and becoming self-love, separates man as genuinely from God as the committal of murder. The Scriptures, knowing of the enemy within, describe the old man as a prisoner. He is kept under the dominion of principalities and powers until he is set free, not by his own action but by the deed of One who has overcome the world.

The Guide Through Life

Scripture's first request, therefore, is not the searching out of devious ways of escape, but rather submission to the true shepherd of the soul, in meekness. It does not demand the courage of a desperate deed, but trust in Him whose liberation from death and the power of evil transcends the limitations of time. The real issue for the Scriptures is whether we have the faith in God who speaks, not only in God who has spoken; in God who saves, as well as in God who has saved His own in the past. What the Bible promises is fabulous, but it is not a fable. When it comes to us with life for our death, with food for our hunger, clothes for our nakedness and with medicine for our illness, it establishes the fellowship which proves in its redemption both the realities of which it speaks and the power of the faith which it evokes.

The Perfection of Life

Lastly, the Scriptures present us with an ideal of goodness. But here again its end is not the elaboration of the ideal of the perfect as a philosophical concept, but projected action. Goodness is thought of in terms of God, not man, and hence ceases to be a static object of our thinking and striving; it becomes alive. The Greeks were capable of a very high conception of goodness, but we find very little trace that they acknowledged any strong moral claims arising out of their vision. "The gods are good, but as for us, let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." The Old Testament is affected in a very different manner by its ideas of goodness. There God says, "Be ye holy, even as I am holy."

In the gospels the reader finds the perfect life presented in terms of response to the Father's will. Jesus revealed in His life and teaching God's holiness. His teaching always moved from the outward to the inward, from the shadow to the substance. Kindness for Him is not merely shown by doing good to friends; it is the utter absence of ill-will in the heart. Purity is not just the observance of marriage laws; it is the entire freedom from the domination of lust. Honor is more than the punctilious keeping of the letter of an oath; it is the translucent quality of a heart whose word of "nay" and "yea" is a sufficient token of its sincerity. Love is much more than the indulgence of a kind affection toward a selected few;

it is the activity springing from an attitude embracing the whole world. To recreate the truth of the Scriptures is to express the power of their words in personal intentions and practices, whose boundaries are not an abstract ideal but the surging power of a character on the road to perfection. It is seeking the glory of God under the impulsion of a new allegiance.

The Instrumentality of the Bible

The great distinction between men is not the arbitrary line which race, culture, and environment have drawn around us, but between those who have come strongly under the influence of the Bible and those who have not. The civilization of ancient Greece, for instance, closely resembles the situation in India today. There is in each a lofty philosophy, sometimes astonishingly alike in their religious and moral conceptions, and there is at the same time a profound degradation of human life in other parts of their society. In both civilizations their ideals seem not only incapable of effecting any improvement in the latter, but even seem to lack the constraining impulse to do so.

The conviction that conduct is the fruit of life is learned from the Bible. It is linked to the persuasion that God is not to be conceived as static perfection whose nature appears in all things that are grounded in that perfection. We come closest to Him, not when with our mind we touch the wide horizons of truth, but when in our purposes we are united with His righteous purpose. Paul certainly did not mean that each of us it to become a perfect man. The vision in his mind was that the one man in Christ Jesus who is constituted by members drawn from all the races of men is still growing to fullness of stature, which will be there when men of all races have been grafted into the body and become its members. The primary condition is met when the direction of the movement is fixed in answer to the question: "We know not whither thou goest; how know we the way?" (John 14:5). Jesus answers not with a dissertation on ethics, but replies, "I am the way."

Growth Into Life

That "way" always starts from where we are. We take our first step in faith by beginning to behave as a Christian or at least more like a true Christian than we have ever done before. The spiritual life is not found by turning away from the material, but by facing it in fellowship with God and using it to become the expression of divine character. Thus flesh is made the vehicle of the spiritual. As the spiritual reproduces itself in our souls, we exhibit the love of God by returning it. In terms of our justification it is proper to say that everything was

once for all accomplished. Something of supreme significance has been done; but the application of that in every sphere of life has still to be worked out. The body of Christ is something which is in the process of being built up until we all come to constitute one perfect man in the measure of the stature of the Messiah.

When heaven is described in the Scriptures in terms of music, it is always a chorus or an orchestra, never a solo. The faith which the Scriptures have evoked in us confronts life in a series of emergencies by exhibiting the direction toward that perfection which is seen in the Person of Jesus Christ, until at last the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the inescapable relation between truth and action?
2. In what central sense is the Word of God "truth"?
3. What conception does Scripture give to life; to corporate life; to eternal life?
4. Can a person be truly a hearer and not a doer of the Word?
5. How can one know whether his heart is hardened or not?
6. What are the "issues" in the reality of evil as presented by the Scriptures? (Cf. "principalities and powers," Eph. 6:12).
7. What is the Biblical idea of goodness?
8. How does the message of Scripture become a living truth for the believer?
9. What can it mean to you that the Bible is "the rule and standard for faith and action?"
10. In what ways can Bible reading and study be set up so that it becomes for you a manual for living?

Helps in the Study of Scripture

There is no book in the history of mankind which has had as much thought and effort expended upon it as the Bible. There is the matter of translation which becomes a recurrent task as the Scriptures are moved by the hands of men of one generation and delivered into those of another. While it is of course the task of the theologians to acquire mastery of the Scriptures in the original tongues, their insights have usually been incorporated into some of the monumental translations of the Bible. We are here concerned, however, not so much with the difficulties which beset the reading of the Scriptures to which theologians and historians must give close attention, but we are engaged in a survey of the multitude of helps which can make the reading of Scripture to us as students a more helpful and deepening experience.

Many translations of the Bible are available. Undoubtedly, from a literary point of view, the most perfect is the *King James Version*. An appreciation of this version as an English classic is forcefully set forth by Charles Allen Dinsmore in his book, *The English Bible as Literature*. His comparison of the Scriptures with universally acknowledged literary classics like Homer's *Iliad*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and the dramas of Shakespeare will sharpen one's appreciation of the literary qualities, not only of the gospels, but even of such books as Esther, Jonah, and Ruth.

The most commonly used Bible for study purposes is the *American Revised Version*, which appeared in 1901. You will find in this version the result of a compromise between the literary artistry of the *King James Version* and the necessary corrections and changes which the passing of three centuries required, both in the choice of words and in the demand which fuller knowledge of the ancient manuscripts involved. This version lends itself readily to serious study because it differentiates between the prose and poetry sections in the manner of its printing. Attention should also be called to the very reliable *English Revised Version* of 1870. No one, however, would wish to be without the *Revised Standard Version* of the New Testament, which appeared in 1946. New light on many familiar verses in the Scripture is thrown by the successful adaptation of the archaic language of the preceding versions into modern American usage. The Old Testament companion volume is to appear in 1951.

There are, of course, other translations which the serious reader of

the Scriptures may consult with profit. Here are the major ones: *The Complete Bible, An American Translation*, edited by Smith and Goodspeed. The first edition of this version appeared in 1931, and a revision in 1939. The first edition of *The New Testament in Modern Speech* by Weymouth appeared in 1929, followed by four other editions. *The New Testament; A New Translation* by James Moffatt was first issued in 1913. An almost indispensable tool for the serious reader of the Scriptures has recently been provided by the Westminster Press in its splendid *Study Edition of the Holy Bible*. This edition for its basic text returns to the King James translation and furnishes each book with a brief but excellent introduction. In addition the text itself is commented upon and difficult words and allusions are explained. It also includes a useful concordance and up-to-date relief maps in color.

Many a reader will turn with delight to two books which very adequately supplement the Westminster *Study Edition*. They are the *Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible* and *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*.

A good one-volume commentary will give the reader of the Scriptures welcome aid. The *Old Testament Commentary* edited by Herbert C. Alleman and Elmer E. Flack provides not only a comprehensive view by treating important subjects in specific articles, but also in elucidating each book of the Bible with an appropriate introduction and textual comments. The *New Testament Commentary* edited by Alleman having been published earlier, has already served usefully for a number of years. A very useful one-volume commentary is that which appeared under the editorship of J. R. Dummelow.

For tracing an idea through the Bible one finds a concordance of almost indispensable value. *Young's* or *Cruden's Concordance* will well repay the reader's consultation.

As one's appreciation of the Scriptures increases he may desire the assistance of more specialized works. The literature in this field is so large that even a cursory listing of the best would exceed the scope of this chapter. The student, however, is referred to the bibliographies which appear in the Old and New Testament commentaries of Alleman and Flack and in such standard works as Hasting's *Bible Dictionary*.

Progress in the enjoyment of the study of the Bible will be made in the measure in which the student acquires a point of view. Luther once expressed the fear that the increasing volume of his own books might slacken the zeal of future readers of the Scriptures. The discriminating reader must guard against this danger. There are, however, a number of books which may furnish new incentives to individual study. In this connection a few helpful books may be listed: Alan Richardson, *Preface*

to *Bible Study*; Gerald J. Rooney, *Preface to the Bible*; H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of the Bible*. Of particular value for orientation is Howard T. Kuist's book, *These Words Upon Thy Heart*. This exposition of Scripture in terms of the Christian response deserves very careful reading. A series devoted to self-help in the study of Scripture is offering now short commentaries representing evangelical scholarship in a readable and practical way, which should appeal to the reader. Thus far in this series (Torch Bible Commentaries) have appeared *The Gospel According to St. Mark* by Archibald M. Hunter and *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* by Ronald H. Preston and Anthony T. Hanson.

Broadening the field of one's appreciation will involve acquaintance with books which deal with historical, literary, archaeological, and theological subjects. Here again we are embarrassed by our riches.

An old but still good book is *The Heroes and Crises of Early Hebrew History* by Charles Foster Kent. *The Old Testament, a Study* by Herbert C. Alleman is a good guide through the Old Testament. *Studies in Old Testament Characters* by Wilbert W. White is an inductive study. A deepening appreciation of the Old Testament may be had from books like *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* by Norman H. Snaith or Philip Hyatt's *Prophetic Religion*.

A simply written account for the understanding of the historical background of the New Testament is contained in the useful little book by W. H. Oldaker, *The Background of the Life of Jesus*. More comprehensive than the aforementioned is William Fairweather's *The Background of the Gospels*. *A History of New Testament Times in Palestine* by Shailer Mathews is still very useful. Admirably written is T. R. Glover's *The World of the New Testament*.

Light from the Ancient Past by Jack Finegan is perhaps the most comprehensive and the most recent book on the archaeology of the Old Testament. On the New Testament, Camden M. Cobern's *The New Archaeological Discoveries and Their Bearing upon the New Testament*, though in some respects outdated, is still quite useful. The classical contribution in this field in the New Testament is *Light from the Ancient East* by Adolf Deissmann.

Books about the transmission and translation of the Bible may be mentioned. One of these is *The Story of the Bible* by Sir Frederick Kenyon, the long-time chief librarian of the British Museum. In Luther A. Weigle's latest book, *The English Version from Tyndale to the Revised Standard Version*, the reader will find a competent apology for the recurrent revisions of the Scriptures culminating in the Revised Standard Version.

We almost certainly gain an incomplete picture of the Scriptures, however, if we exclude from our reading and reflection the theological emphasis. For example, no Lutheran would wish to be without acquaintance with *The Faith of the Christian Church* by Gustaf Aulen. Paul S. Minear's book, *Eyes of Faith: A Study in the Biblical Point of View*, is another illustration of the renewal of interest in the Biblical point of view.

Finally, attention must be called to the writings of Luther himself. Selections which deal with Biblical interpretation are available in several English editions, such as the six volume *Works of Martin Luther* issued by the United Lutheran Publication House. In this edition the reader is directed especially to the Reformer's "Prefaces" and "Introductions" to the Scriptures. The serious student will, of course, want to examine Luther's great commentaries, especially those on Genesis and Galatians.

As an aid to purchasing these books or to finding them in the library the volumes with their publishers will now be listed in the order in which they have been mentioned in the text of this chapter, the only exception being the book by Dinsmore.

Bible Versions

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Conclusion

As you come to the end of this study booklet you may properly ask yourself in what manner the intention of the author to introduce you to the Bible has been helpfully accomplished. As you glance over the titles of these brief chapters you will note that it was the purpose of the author at the outset to introduce you to the Bible by establishing what may be called a theological point of view. Beginning with the fourth chapter, certain suggestions were offered to enable you individually to study the Scriptures fruitfully, culminating in directions offered to make your study profitable for your growing spiritual and intellectual life.

Whether we partake of communion with Him who speaks through the Scriptures or not depends in a large degree upon our initial approach. The uniqueness of the Scriptures demands a unique response. Its communication is not so much a matter of detail or information which we may conveniently garner into the storehouse of our knowledge, but it is the encounter of God with a mind nurtured in the spiritual tradition revived by the Reformation. It is not enough, however, to be sheltered and carried along by a stream of generalities even though they are labeled "religious."

There comes a time in the life of any thoughtful individual when an inner compulsion must be felt to acquire for oneself what has hitherto been accepted on the authority of others. This time of crystallization of a point of view concerning the Scriptures must be the beginning of spiritual maturing which makes of the novice and follower a witness and leader. To be brought into a vital relation with Him who speaks through the Scriptures is the beginning of a pilgrimage in which progress is not measured in years but in fullness of life. This creative encounter with the living God of the Scriptures is the crucial test that our feet are on the highway instead of on the byways.

Next in importance to point of view comes the concern with ourselves. What must I do? How can I learn to derive from this communion with God through the Scriptures spiritual incentives which imbue life with vision and faith? How can I keep myself from those piecemeal efforts which Isaiah characterized in that startling phrase, "line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:10b), and become an unblocked channel for the illumination of the Holy Spirit? No book can serve to its fullest unless we have first learned to ask it those questions which it is designed to answer. It is well, therefore, in any realm of life, to have learned by experience to ask so that the answer can

become the stepping-stone to the next attainment. Should not our pre-occupation with this study have enabled us to ask methodical questions? And, furthermore, should there not have gone hand in hand with the inquiry a new confidence that our mental endowments, applied in disciplined search within the sacred volume and wrought upon by the Spirit of God, provide answers which satisfy our spiritual and our intellectual demands?

This acquisition of skill in the adaptation of our mental processes to further the end of our search is not something which is acquired without labor. But the labor is gladdened by the exercise of our God-given faculties. Communion with God through the Scriptures involves the participation of our mind in organized search and joyful response. Upon the foundation of a directed employment of our powers of observation rests the proper use of books and helps contributed by others.

Lastly, this study should imbue us with a vision of the on-going life which God imparted as the promise of eternity. The intent of the Bible is not perfection in solitude but the casting of the communicant into the matrix of a redeemable world. We are, as Luther expressed it, to be "little Christs" to others. Our learning thus is to keep its freshness and its ardor in the measure in which we are willing to be obedient members of the redeemed family of God. Not as solitaries but as witnesses to others are we impelled to live. As we eat of its food and drink of Scripture's life-giving stream there well up within us "springs of living water." We shall then be able to serve our Lord, not like famished and thirsty people who are driven by external circumstances to try to escape reality, but as those who are channeling from this glorious Book the power of the Holy Spirit into the issues of day by day living.



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